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221058Z Nov 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 006864

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2015

TAGS: PREL IR

SUBJECT: TURKS CONSIDERING VISIT BY IRANIAN FM; STILL TIME
TO TURN IT OFF

REF: ANKARA 006546

Classified By: CDA Nancy McElđowney, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) Summary and Action Request: Turkish MFA DG for the Middle East informed Charge November 22 that FM Gul intends to receive his Iranian colleague, FM Manouchehr Mottaki, in Ankara for a one-day working visit November 30; the initial impetus came from Tehran. Charge stressed repeatedly that this was a bad idea; the optics were terrible and it would accomplish nothing aside from tarnishing Turkey's name with friends and enemies alike. High level USG pressure, in the form of a Secretary Rice-Gul call, might turn this visit off: the Turks have not yet extended November 30 as a possible date, and Mottaki has a very checkered history in Ankara.
End summary.

¶12. (C) Turkish MFA DG for Middle Eastern Affairs Oguz Celikkol called in CDA November 22 to convey that Iranian FM Mottaki - a former Iranian Ambassador to Turkey - has asked to make a one-day working visit to Ankara. The Iranians originally offered November 24; the Turks plan to counter-propose November 30. Per Celikkol, Ankara wanted to consult with the U.S. but did not believe this would be a major problem, since, unlike with Syria, the U.S. "was not isolating Tehran" and the Iranians have been invited to various international fora, including most recently the OIC Conference on Iraq held in Cairo. MFA has not yet been in contact with the EU. Protocol for the working visit would be minimal and Gul would send all the correct messages - that any nuclear ambitions by a country in the region are unacceptable, destabilizing Iraq is unacceptable, the rhetoric of Iranian President Ahmedinejad is unacceptable.

¶13. (C) Charge responded that the optics of an Iranian FM visiting a NATO - and EU candidate - capital would be terrible. The Iranians are at an impasse with the EU-3, Tehran continues to work to destabilize Iraq, and their President recently called for Israel to be wiped off the map. The Iranians have done nothing for which they should be rewarded with an official FM visit to Ankara. Turks should tell the Iranians that if their FM wants to come here, Tehran should first negotiate seriously with the EU-3.

¶14. (C) Celikkol stressed the need to send the message from one neighboring state to another that their behavior on a number of fronts was unacceptable. Tehran needed to hear concern directly from a state in the region. Charge said that talk and sending the right messages was important, but not/not at the FM level and not/not face-to-face in Ankara. If FM Mottaki had to come to Ankara, the Turks could send a strong message by having only one meeting and holding it at the airport. Otherwise, the international perception of a working visit - coming within two weeks of FM Gul's trip to Damascus and on the heels of lukewarm GOT responses to Ahmedinejad's statements on Israel (reftel) - would be extremely negative. Turkey would be buying itself trouble.

¶15. (C) Comment: Celikkol opened the door a crack, indicating that while "the decision had been taken" to receive the Iranian FM, Ankara had not yet extended November 30 as a possible date. Celikkol pledged not to do so until we responded with instructions from Washington. Although Celikkol claimed not to appreciate just how bad the optics of such a visit would be, the Turks may actually use pressure from the U.S. as an excuse to turn this off. Gul recently tried to call Secretary Rice and was unable to get through; a return call from the Secretary at this moment would be very timely. Mottaki, a former Iranian Ambassador to Ankara, left under a cloud in 1989, when Ankara recalled its Ambassador from Tehran as well - the Turks were unhappy with Tehran's, and Mottaki's, attempts to export Islamic revolution. A Mottaki visit would release a storm of protest from secular parties and likely the military as well, not something the AKP government needs.
MCELDOWNNEY